



LOVE THAMIZH

Love Thamizh is a multilingual online journal with articles in English about the language history and culture of Tamilnadu and translations from Tamil and to Tamil

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The Image of Woman in Tamil Literature



Anand Amaladass S.J. Chennai.



The image of woman as portrayed in world literature is ambiguous. On the one hand she is praised as beautiful and even as divine and on the other hand she is treated as slave and sex object. The Indian poets (Sanskrit or Tamil) usually describe women from head to foot – every limb or part of woman's body. But the image of woman is not just stereotyped, as some might think. The image of woman and the role of her body vary from culture to culture and Tamil culture adds its own unique features.

Flower ('Pū') as the Medium of Earth-Woman Conflation

Smell as the leitmotif of eco-feminist consciousness in Tamil tradition attributes fragrance to earth and woman. Both these categories share the common meaning of smell of *pū* (flower). The rationality of eco-feminism is based on the internal semantic identity among 'flower, earth and woman' in the Tamil ethos. It is just enough to read the poem *Kuruntokai* to understand this spirit, as out of the four hundred poems more than two hundred and fifty exhibit the magnificent parade of the flowers of the Tamil land.

A sense of play characterizes the Tamil cultural outlook and its linguistic constructions. The bonding between the flower and the woman shows itself in the seven-fold flowering stages namely, 1. *Arumbu*, 2. *Moṭṭu*, 3. *Mugai*, 4. *Malar*, 5. *Alar*, 6. *Vī* and 7. *Cemmal*. These stages are associated with the size and timing of the flowering process. Similarly there are seven stages in the life and development cycle of the woman. They are: 1. *Pēdai*, 2. *Pedumbai*, 3. *Maṅgai*, 4. *Maḍandai*, 5. *Arivai*, 6. *Terivai* and 7. *Pēṟilampeṇ*. It is significant to note that the most fertile stages of *maṅkai* and *maṭantai* are associated both with the land and the woman (*pū-maṅkai*, *pū-maṭantai*). (Cf. Vanathu Antoni, 2018).

Smell in the Tamil Literary Tradition

It is no wonder then that *Tirukkural* catches onto this idea when it speaks of the fullness of all sensations as present in the female. “*Kaṇṭu kēṭṭu uṇṭu uyirttu urru ariyum aimpulaṇum/ oṇṭōṭi kaṇṇē ula*” (“All the five sensuous pleasures of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch abound in a maiden bedecked with bangles”), (Kural 1101).

The pervasiveness of smell is imaginatively recaptured by *Tirukkural* in the context of the mystique of the earth and the mystery of the woman. It highlights the point that “*cuvaiyōḷi ūrōcai nārṟameṇru aintiṇ/ vagaiterivan kaṭṭē ulagu*” (“The person who has hold over the world is the one who knows all aspects of the five senses of taste, sight, touch, sound and smell”). (Kural 27).

The beauty of the woman’s body finds its finest expression in the couplet, “*murimeṇi muttam muruvalverī nārṟam/ vēluṇkaṇ veytōḷ avatṭku*” (“To the bamboo-shouldered maiden, tender shoot is her body, pearls her teeth, natural smell her fragrance and spear is her eye”), (Kural 1113). Another couplet once again inserts the heart into the depths of the eco-feminist motif and transports the soul into the enchantment of smell, namely “*Mukaimokkuḷ ullatu nārṟampōḷ pētai/ nakaimokkuḷ ulladonru uṇṭu*” (“Like the opening bud conceals fragrance, the young girl’s budding smile conceals a secret”). (Kural 1274).

Woman’s hair is said to be one of the unique contributive factors for her beauty. The Sangam poets dwell at length in describing this aspect. Kapilar (Akanānūru 168) says: “*pinnuviṭu neṟiyil kilaiya kūntal*”. Ilamkīranar shows special interest in this aspect. (Kuruntokai 116). He has composed 16 songs (Akanānūru -9; Nārṟinai - 6; Kuṟuntokai -

1). Half of these poems praises the hair of woman. More than any other poets Ilamkīranar has concentrated on woman's hairstyle and its beauty.

There is an interesting legend concerning the fragrance motif in the narrative of the *Tiruvilaiyādal Purāṇam*. The setting is the royal court of the Pāṇṭiya king. The subject matter of controversy is whether the woman's hair has natural fragrance. The pleader is the poet Tarumi who is said to have received from the Lord Shiva himself the poem which asks the honey bee if it knows any flower which is more fragrant than the woman's hair (Kuruntokai.2). The opponent is none other than Nakkirar, the royal poet and the chief arbiter in matters of literary disputes and he is also an ascetic scholar. The story is based on the popular belief of the Tamils that the earth has fragrance and therefore the woman's hair also must have fragrance.



A number of instances from the *akam* poems emphasize this point “*Vāṇmugai irumṇodu kaṁaḷum kūṇḍal*” (Fragrant hair with sweet smelling flowers”) (Naṟṟinai. 238), and “*Kuṇḍalai nāṟum kuṇḍai iruṇkūṇḍal*”(Kuruntokai. 300), speak of the natural fragrance of the maiden's hair. Ilamkīraṇār is an important poet who repeatedly goes ecstatic on this aspect. Of a total of 16 poems, he has six instances which speak of the fragrance of the hair. “*Verikaṁaḷ turumuḍi*”(“Thick swaying hair spreading fragrance” - Naṟṟinai. 308); “*Kaḍipadam kaṁaḷum kūṇḍal*”(“Lady with fragrant hair adorned with small fresh jasmine flowers”), (Naṟṟinai. 346); “*Pūṁpuṇai puyaleṇa olivarum taliruṇ kūṇḍal*”(“Thick low hanging dark hair like clouds made with flowers”), (Akanānūru. 225); “*Vīṭer paravai vilaiyum pōḍār kūṇḍal*” (“Flower

smelling hair desired by the swarming bees –vax eloquent about the natural fragrance”), (Akanānūru. 371). *Aiñkurunūru* mentions that even the shoulders and the chest have smell. “*Naṛuntōḷ naṛuntaṇ mārbu*”, (Akanānūru .227) and “*paṇimalar kuvalai uḷḷagam kamalum kūndal*” (“Hair with the fragrance of the insides of cool, blue water-lilies”), (*Ibid.*, 225).

“The culture of hair is no trivial matter” Barbara Miller insists. Hair power may be implicit and subtle, explicit and brutal. What does hair have to do with power and control? This flimsy, fragile and delicate, but very material stuff is related to power in complex and culturally varied ways.¹

Miller conceptualizes hair from three angles: individually experienced hair, socially symbolic hair and political hair. The Qing government decree in China (1644) insisted on hair prescriptions – men shaving of the forehead and braiding their hair into a queue as a sign of Manchu style. In 20th century there was anti-Manchu resistance movement issuing a decree to abandon the queue. In the classic Japanese poetry there links are indicted between a woman’s long black head hair and themes of sexuality and life, between the spirits in her hair and her personal power.

So the Tamil myth of debating whether the woman’s hair has natural fragrance contains implicit social messages, since the poetic conventions indicate that power vested in head hair defines and stratifies people according to gender, social position and the sacred. It assumes a sense of sacred as Shiva is brought into this discussion. The social message is that woman’s hair is related to mother earth, which has natural fragrance and also wields power.

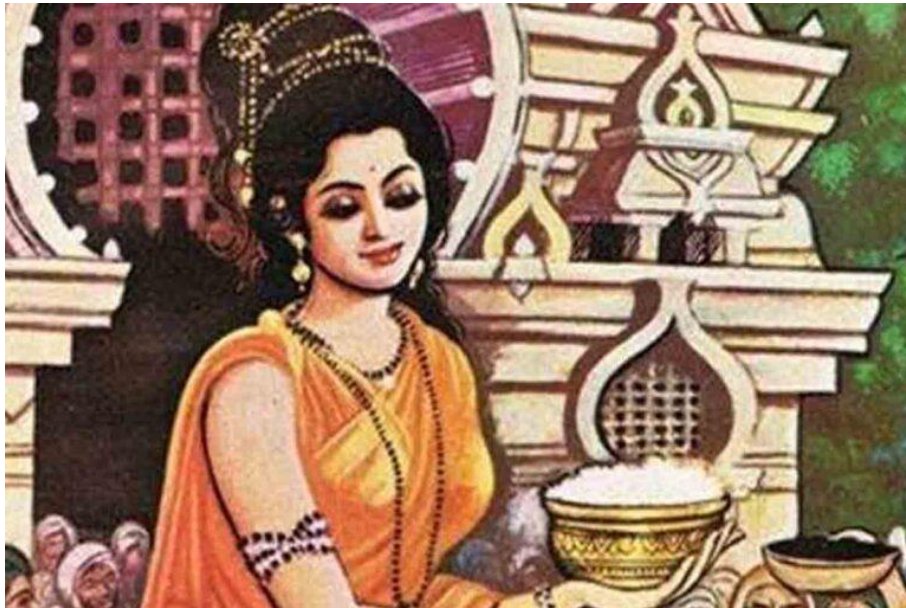
Breast

The poets usually describe women from head to foot – every limb or part of woman’s body. *Porunar Arruppatai* describes the 18 limbs of a woman in 18 lines beginning with her hair and ending with her feet. But the breast gets a special place in their description. The painters and sculptors exploit this feature in their creative works.

¹ *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*. Edited by Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller, State University of New York, 1998.

Marilyn Yalom, a senior scholar at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at Stanford, has undertaken a scholarly and entertaining view of the breast from paleolithic times to the present. (*The History Of the Breast*). For both men and women, the very word "breast" is evocative. Breasts are, at varying times, sources of wonder, pleasure, sensual delight, pain, humiliation and anguish. Yalom suggests that a history of the breast fits well within the context of "the reign of the phallus which has dominated western culture for twenty-five hundred years."

But in Tamil tradition there is a twist. "Plucking the breast" seems to be a Tamil way of showing the anger or disappointment by women. Kannaki, the heroine in the ancient Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram*, enraged by the injustice done to her husband by the king of Madurai, plucked one of her breasts off and flung it on the town, thereby setting fire to the entire town.



The juxtaposition here of 'plucked breasts' by Kannaki and Āntāl deserves special attention. In the bhakti poems of Āntāl there is a reference to her passionate love for Kannan. In *Nācciyār Tirumoli* (8) Āntāl expresses her anguish thus:

“If I should meet that Govardhan
who cares not if she lives or is dead
who melts within and is worn out

All for that mischievous bandit's love,
I shall pluck my useless breasts
From their roots and fling them
On his chest, and so put out
The raging fire of my love.”

In the recent history woman cutting of her breast took place in the 19th century in Travancore, when the caste oppression was at its peak and women were asked to pay taxes for covering their breast. It is said that Nangeli, a poor Ezhava woman, did not have money to pay the tax and so as a mark of protest she cut off her breasts and then claimed that she did not have to pay the tax. This narrative has become a symbol of courage in the midst of injustice and has found also artistic expression.²

The Tamil epic heroines

Kannaki, Mātavi and Manimekalai are the three heroines of Tamil epics- *Cilappatikāram* and *Manimekalai* authored by the poets Ilanko and Cāttanār. These three women are part of a common story line. All the three are not successful heroines, but sadness written large in their faces. They reflect in a way the socio-political situation of the then prevailing Tamil society.

All the three are the victims of the social conventions or structures. They struggled within their given status in society but at the end they break such conventions and that is why they are heroines. The modest, chaste and loyal wife Kannaki breaks out of her subdued self and challenges the King of Madurai in defense of her husband Kovalan who was murdered without trial. She even burns the city of Madurai in anger.

Manimekalai refuses to follow the practice of her tradition and becomes a Buddhist Bhikkuni. She could not lead a normal family life because of her low status. Why they are so destined to suffer is not answered by the creators of these epics. The only standard answer they repeat is the so-called fate, *Ūl*, an unknown force in life. One need not accept this position of the poets.

² Cf. R. Balakrishnan, *Journey of a Civilization*. 2019, 387-388.

Manimekalai is presented as a woman of compassion concerned about the hungry people of the society and feeding them miraculously, following the path shown by Buddha. Perhaps that was an emergency situation created by natural calamities like draught, lack of monsoon, leading to the failure of the agricultural society.

She is also portrayed as a philosopher in the city of Kanchipuram, which was the home of several great Buddhist scholars like Dinnāga, Dharmakīrti and others. Manimekalai visits the followers of the several philosophical schools, listens to them and finally decides to follow the Buddhist path.

This epic conveys the message of changes brought about in the life of women. Women get the right to enter into Buddhist Sangha as members. This Sangha accepts also the leadership of women. Here it is shown that women could lead an independent life without the support of men and engage in development of society. This epic also breaks the conventions of family and patriarchal systems. Above of all, the education of women is emphasized.



Women in ordinary day-to-day life

Tamil literature is not merely talking about people of higher status like the kings and queens, but it portrays the lives of ordinary people. Sangam literature in particular reflects the struggles of people at the lower strata of society.

What is interesting for us to note is that women took part in the primary and secondary sectors of economic production like agriculture, grazing the cattle and fishing. “The women who guarded the grain field (tinaippunam kātta koṭicciyar (Akam 118, 102);

āyar makalir tolil (Puram 43); women making boxes out of palmyra leaves, growing cotton (paruttip pentir), selling toddy, kal virra ariyal makalir (Akam 157); selling salt (uppu virkum umanappen (Akam 390).

Women also took part in arts and entertainments (nāṭaka makalir – *Perumpānārṟupāṭai* 55, viraliyar, Akam 352); foretelling the future and interpreting the signs (akavan makal kaṭṭuvicci); they were in charge of the lighting the lamps in the temples (koṇṭi makalir, pāsarai peṇṭir – *Pattinappalai* 246-249) and were busy with flower decorations.

Puranānūru 326, Poet: Thangāl Porkollanār,

“As a wild cat with long steps stalks her in pitch
darkness, a hen fears for her life, clucks loudly
straining her throat, and then she sees her mate
with his comb like a big coral flower, in the light lit by a
woman who spins cotton thread, removing the sides
and dried matter from cotton pods, and she calms down.
The woman desires to share with bards and guests, the dish
cooked with fatty pieces of a short-legged monitor lizard
that the children of hunters caught on a pond shore
only a short distance away, to which curds were added.
Her husband, the lord of this town, gives abundant gifts
and gold face ornaments worn by noble elephants that
attacked in harsh, huge battles.”(Translation by Vaidehi)

What is important here is the woman with the little lamp in hand supervises at night.

Reference

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Are the Naga Devatas, Nucleic acids?!



Dr. Krithika Gokulnath

One Mythological belief that has existed across all the ancient civilizations has been that of the Nagas. From the Mesopotamian, Sumerian civilization to the ancient-most civilizations in Asia and America, the snakes have been creeping in everywhere.

In the civilizations abroad, dragons, bhasmu or other varieties of the snakes, like winged ones, with fore feet, with multiple hoods, etc have been described.

The Naga devatas of India have been among the most worshipped. One explanation for the act of worship may be based on the ideology of seeking help from that soul that frightens us. This has been the philosophy behind worship of Lions, Tigers, Wild boars, Eagles, Vultures, Elephants etc, in the tribal cultural practices. It is believed that every living organism would have that parental instinct which would protect and that is how these animals were approached when our ancestors explored means of coexisting with nature.

After the advent of Bhakti period, in India, human form was given to Gods. Hoping that the concept of the divine could be made relatable to the 'not so spiritually inclined'. In this era too, it could be noticed that snakes have been used along with almost every God in Hinduism. Shiva is depicted with the snake around his neck, Vishnu is depicted as one who

uses a serpent as his bed, Goddesses have them above their head, Ganesha wears it as his belt, Karthikeya has it under his feet. It is this animal, the snake that is always depicted along with the other animals which acted as vehicles for transport.

While mythological stories are exaggerated narratives and have always been as large as the figment of the writer's imagination, there is always one spark, as an idea or observation which leads to it.



For example, in the Tamil novel Ponniyin Selvan the writer explains a natural phenomenon and explains the science behind it justifying how people were misled and satisfied with simple explanations. The 'Kolli vai pisasu' or a fire spindle demon is feared as a demon which can engulf people and burn them down to ashes. The writer explains that this natural phenomenon is due to the methane underneath the soil that lights up when it comes out through crevices.

The above has one fact which is weaved into a story and then a mythological epic sometimes.

Snakes have been mentioned along with the Kundalini shakthi, in Yoga. This is described as a type of energy that is located at the base of one's spine and is like a coiled snake in its resting stage. Yogic seekers practice the physical exercises of Yoga so that they become capable enough of using their core muscles so efficiently that they can stimulate this coiled energy to travel through the Yoga chakras or the plexuses in the human body. The kundalini in its highest point or the sahasrara chakra can help a human to attain spiritual enlightenment.

The core muscles are important for helping us achieve a lot of strength physically. A type of core strengthening exercise named the 'Nauli Kriya' is done by dramatically oscillating the abdominal muscles like a wave.

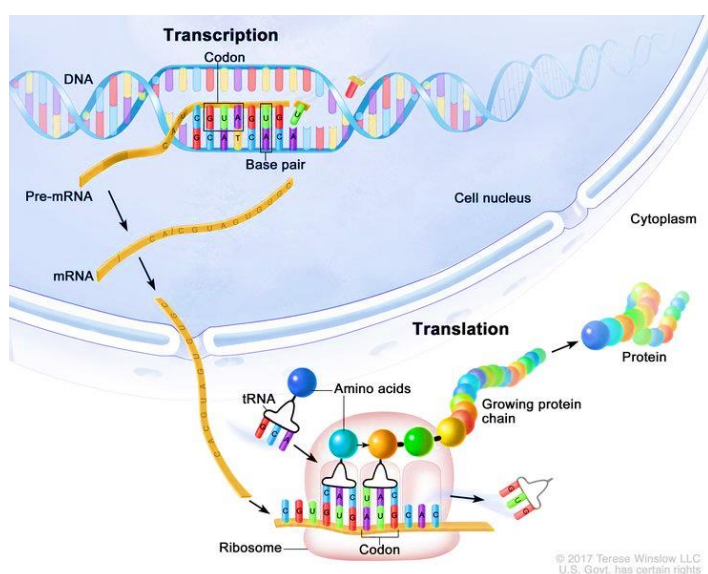
There is one legend about churning of the ocean using a serpent as the rope. It is mentioned that the devas took their positions towards the tail of the serpent and the asuras took their positions near its head. At a point the snake spits venom called Ala-Haala. This is consumed by Shiva. Parvathy, wife of Shiva immediately holds Shiva's neck and stops the venom from descending downwards and further harming Shiva. Further churning brings out the elixir 'Amrutham' which is described as something that can give one who consumes, 'Immortality'.



The legend is the Myth which is sparked from the possible fact or yogic exercise that one can attain immortality by activating the Kundalini energy, which is like a serpent. The path that the serpent would take to reach the Sahasrara which is located about 2 feet above one's head, is through the plexuses which are centres of energies in the body. Each point of the plexus would have beneficial effects as well as detrimental effects. Moreover, there are two psychological factors, the deva- which only focusses on the ultimate goal, of spiritual enlightenment and the other namely, Asura which is a distraction. Thus, for successfully crossing each point in the plexus one undergoes the moral dilemma between the distraction and focus within oneself.

The first experience that comes out of an abdominal churning exercise such as a Nauli Kriya results in an acid reflux that harms the throat at the maximum. This might have been indicated in the legendary story. The successful completion of the Kundalini yoga helps one achieve spiritual enlightenment and thus immortality.

The above seems again as one filled with assumptions and experiences that are completely personal for every individual. There can be no guideline or a step by step Manual for such spiritual practices.



From the point of view of science and based on the Tamil knowledge seeking advices such as ‘andathil ulladhu pindathil irukkum’, meaning what is in the universe is also the truth in an inanimate object, or the one word description of God as ‘Kada-vul” meaning introspect. If we assume that there might be a greater and deeper meaning for the symbology of snakes, we could try to get to that fact that has now spun into that yarn which has then been woven into a fabric of some Garment.

The quest began with the symbology. The deities carved out of rock and worshipped have usually two types of hooded serpents along with an intertwined couple of snakes. Some images are attached for better understanding.

As a student of Biochemistry, I assume that the snakes could be analogous to Nucleic Acids. The Naga devata trio could describe the transcription and translation processes through which proteins are synthesized.

The Naga devata with two inter twined snakes is assumed to be the DNA. The snake with a 5 headed hood is assumed to be the mRNA. The one with 7 heads can then be associated with t-RNA.

DNA is the basis for all variety in life. The variations result from the recombination process that happens after the sperm and the egg fuses. The DNA from the mother and the father may be represented as the inter twined snakes.

The mRNA is a single stranded molecule. It has been described to have a 5' cap and a long tail on its 3' end. This carries the information encoded in the DNA and brings it out of the nucleus for protein synthesis in the cytoplasm. The mRNA has the information for protein synthesis in the form of anticodons, which are 3 in number. The tRNA is a folded structure with 7 points of interaction. 3 of them are attached to the anti-codon that is complementary to the codon on the mRNA, 3 arms, Amino acid on one end. Each tRNA, thus, brings in an amino acid which gets successively strung into a polypeptide chain that would eventually fold into a functional protein.

In the Naga devatas, it may be observed that the 5 headed snake has a visibly prominent long tail. The figure carved on it is depicted with a winged being. These might probably indicate the 3' tail and the 5' cap.

The Naga devata with a 7 headed hood seems to have an extensively folded body. This also has a symbol that is represented in the inter twined double snake carvings. As if it indicates that it is the information that was coded on the DNA.

If the assumptions above are true, then the Naga-Sarpa dosha might refer to mutations (dosham means defect) that are detrimental and the Yogam (means luck), the beneficial mutations in the DNA.

Our ancestors have been masters of coding and disguising information and have always left it as stories due to which the legends have been carried from generations to generations. Facts would be forgotten soon. But stories always remain. These stories also give us perspectives based on the listener's interest and thus our ancient texts are filled with many such unexplored treasures.

Picture Credits: Google images.

The Notion of Beauty in the Tamil tradition.



Dr. Anand Amaldas S.J. Chennai.

What is beauty? is a much-debated question in all cultures. It is a quality; it is a discerning ability; it is perception of the inner significance in all that exists; it is known through what is pleasing and attractive; its nature is also conditioned by the language which articulates it, etc.



In the Tamil tradition how does it manifest itself and how does one have access to this concept? One way would be philological – analyzing the words that denote beauty in the available literature and draw conclusion from that scrutiny. For example, we find several terms denoting beauty.

Jean-Luc Chevillard in his article “Codifying Beauty...” (2020) gives the following details culled out from the Tamil sources. Eight terms to denote beauty are found in *Tolkāppiyam*: Ammai – prettiness, Alaku – elegance, Tonmai - antiquity, Tōl - shield,

Viruntu – new-comer, Iyaipu – agreement, Pulaṇ – clarity, Iḷaipu – reeling (of a yarn). There are 34 terms found in the First sutra of Ceyyuliyal).

Yāpparunkalak kārikai (10th Cent.) a metrical compendium with its commentary (11th cent) States: vanappu (beauty) is subdivided into eight, namely: ammai, alaku, tonmai, tōl, viruntu, iyaipu, pulan, and ilaipu (YK 43- 8)

Tivākaram (9th century) gives the following synonyms:

(3a) ēr, vanappu, eḷil, yāṇar, māmai, taiyal, //

kārikai, tōtti, kaviṇē, viṭankam// vāman, vakuppu, oppu, mañcu, poṭpu, //

kāmar, aṇi, ivai kaṭṭalaku ākum. [The 17 words] ēr, vanappu, [...] kāmar, and aṇi,

are [synonymous with] kaṭṭalaku (*Tivākaram* 1397)

(3b) naviyē, antam, mai, pū, pai, polam// tivi, oṇ, māṇpu, patam, alaku eṇpar.

They say that [the 10 words] navi, antam [...] māṇpu and patam are [synonymous with] alaku (*Tivākaram* 1398)

(3c) vicittiram pēralaku

[the word] *vicittiram* [is] great alaku (*Tivākaram* 1399)

Ammāi and alaku [alliteration], Tonmai and tōl [alliteration], Iyaipu and ilaipu [alliteration], Viruntu and tonmai [simple semantic contrast]

Some select terms to denote beauty.

In a recent publication *Tamil Alakiyal* by Ti.Su. Natarajan (2012) we find another list of words denoting beauty.

Tiru – it is the quality that attracts the attention and is liked by the onlookers;

Am – It is the quality of beauty which makes one wonder;

Aṇi – it enables to approach the realm of beauty, plays a decorative role;

Ēr – it appears in great deeds, is related to work;

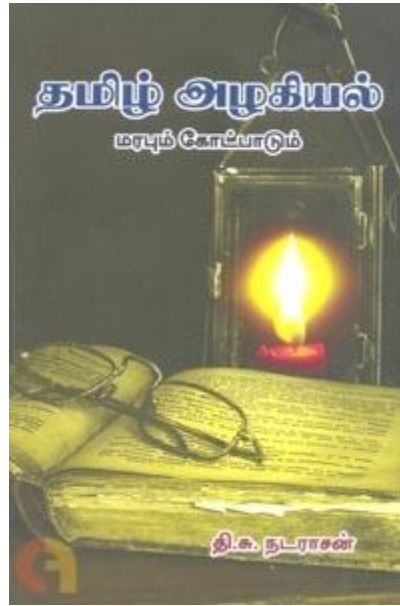
Maintu – *kottuk kottena unarvuruttum alaku*. (*Cilappatikāram* 1.8.120);

Vanappu – what is connected with nature's richness; (kavinperu vanappu – *Tirumurukāruppatai*);

Vaṭivu – beauty defined by shape or form, which stands out in the first place in beauty;

Vaṇṇam- beauty that gives the colour by its richness/fullness/density;

Nalan – vati nalam (*Ainkuru* 475); mān nalam (*Ainkuru* 258, 458)



Such a rich store of vocabulary shows the intense search for beauty and also points to the deeper understanding of this concept. Different words are not just synonyms, but they are attributes of a common conception of beauty, emphasizing different aspects of that reality called beauty.

What emerges out of this concept is that which appears as attractive and that it pleases the onlookers. Beauty then is the subtle perception which is able to discern in the object outside and at the same time it acts/operates with the knowledge of sense perception and mental make-up of the listener or onlooker.

The grammarians insisted on the state of feeling between the objects and their perceptions. *Oppu*, *uru*, *cāyal*, *ēr*, *elil* are concepts related to the aesthetics; *kaṭpu*, *nān*, *maṭan* - are social values; *veṟuppu*, *nōy*, *vēṭkai*, *nukalvu* - are indicative of mental state – all these are not objects that could be shown or seen by the eyes. They are perceived by the heart. This

is what *Tolkāppiyam* (53) points out. In particular what relates to the appearance – *oppu*, *uru*, *cāyal*, *ēr* and *ēlil* – are grasped by the heart or objects that cannot be seen by the eyes. “*uṇarcci vāyil uṇarvēl valitte*” – *Uyiriyal* 95). That means, beauty is not merely the attribute or quality of an object outside, but is related to the inner feeling of the onlooker (subject), that is, beauty exists only in the process of its being grasped or perceived. It is the interaction between the two. It is the dialectic of the state of feeling and of the mental state of human culture. In the words of Bharati:

“It is that light which makes the grass smile, transforms the flowers as wonder,
Purifies the muddy earth, blossoms in water, makes the heavens its abode, thus
arouses wonder.”

“Pullai nakaiyuruttip pūvai viyappākki

Mannait telivākki nīril malarcci tantu

Vinnai veliyākki vintai ceyuñ cōti”. (Kuyil Pāttu)

The commentator of Mānikkavācakar’s *Tirukkōvaiyar* (12-13th Century) explains thus: *Tiru* means the quality that is pleasing to the onlooker. Is it in the object or in the subject? It is in the interaction between both. “Whoever looks at any object, is pleased with that or is attracted toward that object. The desire towards that object, its special shape and goodness, light of whatever kind – goes with it. All this arises/ is awakened by the desire of the onlooker. That is why *tiru* means beauty – *alaku*.”

In aesthetics there are three more aspects included. They are *uru*, *nal*, *oli*. Here *uru* means what is proportionately structured as a whole. *Nalan* and *oli* are the effects of that *tiru* manifested. *Uru* is material form; *nalan* is its inner significance. *Oli* is the final effect or power manifested at the end, fruit of that form/shape.

If this is the understanding of beauty, then it implies that beauty cannot be static, it must be dynamic. It evokes always something new. The newness comes from the onlooker whose inner response to the object outside is not the same all the time. The interaction between the art object and the mental make-up or the mood of the viewer conditioned by

the way he perceives it will vary. That is why the artwork evokes always something new. Mere repetition means it is dead. But art is alive, always changing creatively.

The modes of communication:

Tolkāppiyam has given two concepts which are important to understand the notion of beauty: *ullurai* and *iraicci*. In general it is said that “all words point to a sense or meaning” – *ellāc collum porul kurittanave* (*Peyariyal*, 1). And this is done in two ways: “The sense stands classified into two ways: direct signification and suggestive or implies sense. (*Peyariyal* 3).

Ullurai - “The suggestive simile is structured in such a way as to enable the reader to infer the intended meaning from the described simile.” (*Akattinaiyiyal* 48). That is, instead of saying openly the intended meaning and its impact are indirectly, in a hidden way, suggested.



Iraicci is the suggestive impact. An implied sub-text emerges from *iraicci*, besides its evocative description of flora and fauna will be obvious to men of discernment.” (*Poruliyal* 33-35). That is, *iraicci* goes one step further than the *ullurai*, another level of significance is evoked. This adds depth to the theme related to love between man and woman.

Kalaviyal 17 elaborates this further: “Bashfulness and credulity being ingrained in feminine nature the passion of love of the heroine will find expression through suggestion modes, and through the context of the situation and not through explicit utterance.”

Kāmat tinaiyin kanninru varūm
Nānum maṭānum penmaiya ākalin
Kurippinum iṭattinum allatu, vētkai
Nerippaṭa vārā, aval vayināna.

Some implications:

What is blunt, fully open, directly said, does not attract much, when compared to what is half-hidden and half-revealed. Why is it so? Because it stimulates the imagination of the onlooker and gives scope to perceive it differently. That is why poets use often this mode of communication for the sake of greater effectiveness. Even in ordinary conversation people prefer to speak in evocative, suggestive, indirect way of saying it.

Secondly, delicate feelings are better indicated or evoked and suggested rather than blunt statement. This could be a cultural trait, which respects the aesthetic sensibility of the reader or viewer.

But there are things in life, which cannot be denotatively expressed. Deeper experiences in life go beyond words. The words could not reach and the mind cannot grasp through cognitive means of knowledge. Such experiences could only be hinted at, evoked, suggested. That is why religious scriptures for instance mostly use evocative metaphors or symbol language.

What is Beauty then?

Here the notion of beauty is not defined in scholastic terms, but the perception of reality and the way the land is divided and human phases of love classified point to the underlying thought behind what is meant by beauty. Beauty is perceived and experienced in nature and in human relationship as something which lies beyond words. It is for instance implied that beauty is evocative, suggestive, hinting at, rather than static and reified. That evocation takes place when things are opaque and in a way elusive. In other words, what is half-revealed and half-open evokes more than a blunt statement.

So one can identify the characteristics of beauty. They are revealed for instance in the way proverbs are in use in common parlance. E.g. “What is half-revealed and half-closed is more attractive than what is blunt or fully exposed or fully covered”. Why is it so?

Still we need some *conceptual clarity* before we analyze it. So concepts like theory of *tinai*, *akam/puram* categories, notion of *ullurai uvamai*, *iraicci* (*kurippu* 1428), *meyppātu*, *vanappu* (1483), *alaku* (1484) etc. are important.

Tinai means a.) geographical division, b.) a classification of *akam* and *puram* poetry and c.) propriety of the characters in *akam* love. (Tol 2). *Tinai* is *itam kāla nilaikalin inaive* – that is relation between nature and man. It is revealed through the background of the literature and its meaning, not directly but indirectly.

Tinai is a human eco-system. The division of the land in to five groups – *kurinci*, *mullai*, *marutam*, *neytal* and *pālai* – mountains, forest, country-side, coastal-belts, and deserts. There were occupational classes: *kūttar* (actors), *pānar* (musicians), *virāli* (dancer), *tutiyar*, *paraiyar*, *pulaiyar*, *mallar*, *katampar*, *vēttuvar*, *kuravar*, *āyar*, *kōvalar*, *ulavar*, *partavar* and *kalvar*.



Akam: means: “inside, house, place, agricultural tract, breast, mind”. In the cultural and literary spheres it also means “inner life”, “private life” and more specifically “all aspects of love”, i.e. premarital, marital and extramarital love.

Puram means “outside, exterior, that which is foreign”; it means in literature “outward life, public life, political life” and more specifically “heroism, war”. *Akam* and *puram* are like the inner palm of the hand and its back. *Akam* has two basic divisions of *kalaru* (premarital love) and *karpu* (wedded and extramarital love). *Iraicci*: (suggestion, implications) through the description of a natural phenomenon or event. There is also *ullurai uvaman* or implied metaphor. The technique of allegory (*ullurai*) and *iracci* is comparable to the Sanskrit *vyanjana*.

Meyppātu – there are 32 *meyppātukaḷ*, 8 states of consciousness etc. (*utal moli*, *ceyal vinai*). The human emotions are conditioned/nurtured by these factors. It is not fixed, rigid, static. But flexible/changing – so the beauty is perceived in the rhythm of being (*ōcaiyolukku*, *otticaivu nayam*, *cantam*, *toṭainayam*).

The question is what constitutes beauty in the language of poetry, or songs (Tol. 1034) or *mudras* or movements of body (dance forms, Tol. 1009, 1021) etc.?

Here comes the theory of composition.

What is *nūl* (Tol. 1415, 1590), its characteristics, etc. How do we communicate? What do we communicate? *The medium is the message* has become almost a cliché nowadays.

The evocative nature of this language structure points to something beyond what it says – *ullurai* (1240, 1184, 995-97), *iraicci* (Tol. 1171-3) The nature is what is perceived. We do not create it, but we discover the depth dimension of what it is. One cannot change it. One has to accept it, experience it in depth what is given. This is *aintiram*, *pañcabhūtas*, the five elements are the basic constituents of this universe.

Something is fixed (*Ūl*) and something is transient (*nillā ulakam* Tol. 1022). That is the *svabhāva* of what exists (*ullatu*). The tension between the two, the proportion between them synchronizes, harmonizes, evokes, animates, creates, unifies, fascinates and elevates. That is the beauty. When it is out of proportion it brings about dissonance, “sorrow”, hurts, disturbs, deprives. The result of the movements of the given forces is good and evil. (*tīlum nanrum pīrar tara vārā*).

What is the role of human being in this? S/he is the field of operation, “interior landscape”, the actor, witness, etc. He discovers it within himself, which pattern is operative outside – namely, the division of land (space), division of seasons (time), grades of living beings, etc. Here comes the link between language and consciousness, language and nature. The enactment of this is seen in life. cf. Cilappatikāram where *ūl*, *tarveyal*, and *iyalpu* (fate, chance and nature) interplay.

So beauty is not something sweet and pleasing rhyme schemes. Beauty is discovering the harmony in the structure of nature, how they are structured in nature. Man can imitate it in his actions, through words in praise (poetry), in dance forms. He sings and dances and through that act he goes beyond. If one perceives a pattern, you have already gone beyond it. This beyond is not outside of himself, It is also within. One cannot talk of the surface without the depth.

Here comes in the question of transcendence. (*arivu varampu katanta nilai, anupava ellai katanta nilai, pulanukarvukkācikkē appārpatta, arivukkūrrin atankā nilai*).

All the analysis, experience of *alaku*, *vanappu*, *meyppātu* etc. are ways of going beyond. They do not retain in themselves. Why do we talk of the transcendence? Only on that level a real transformation, an inner change, takes place. Without that it remains as an emotional trait, a momentary passing phenomenon. That is the impact of arts, poetry, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture etc.



Does color of the skin play a role in defining beauty?

The nature is endowed with multiple colours. Man found his taste, beauty and utility in these colours. So he created his artworks out of these colours. Vannam meant music, regularity and beauty. Just as there is a difference in colours in all objects on earth, man's body has its variations. But due to social construct the colour has to come to signify a social status, thus also a sign of protest. Black and red/yellow are seen caste symbols. Now how did phenomenon this come about?

A man of black colour is considered low, poor, uneducated, uncultivated, ugly etc. In the marriage market for example the woman's colour of the body determines her worth, her beauty, and her value.

From the literary sources we find *Tolkappiyam* giving some hints. According to *Tolkappiyam* black and red are signs of anger. (*Karuppum civappum vekulip porula...*) Kural also speaks of it in the same sense: "Even to a man who maliciously did him harm,

the righteous man's ideal is not to return evil." (Kural - 312). Kaṟuttinnā ceyta akkaṇṇum... Here the word *kaṟuttu* is used in the sense of anger.

But beauty is not associated with the colour of the body. On the other hand, the gods are spoken of in terms of colours. Māyon is blue like the mountain. Balarāma (vāliyon) is white like waterfall of a river. Tirumal and Balarāma are associated with colours but not Murukan and Koṟṟavai. Shiva's neck is said to be black and blue since he swallowed the poison.

During the bhakti period gods and humans are spoken of with various colours. Manikkavacakar speaks of Shiva with five colours. The commentators identify these colours as white, black, red, gold-like, smoke-like. Another information coming from bhakti literature is that black is the colour of beauty in Antal's hymn. (*Kaṇṇan ennum kaṟum teyvam...*). Alvars sang of Tirumāl as *kariya māṇikkam*. *Nannūl* 301 – is commented as the "black eye filled with beauty." (*kaṟuppin kaṇ mikkullatu alaku*).

But the political scenario changed in Tamil tradition during the foreign rule, beginning with the Mughul period, the Vijayanagar empire, then the British. During the emergency situation the rulers were of higher status and the ruled of lower status – So the black-red is not merely related to the notion of beauty, but of status, authority and power. So the people of black colour were discredited and the orientation of taste also changed down the centuries among the ordinary people.

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CHAPTER - 1



Vijenni



1432, Thai Maatham, Paridhāvi Aandu
Arava Kingdom
Athikoodoor

Since the day he had saved himself from his death, she had been haunting him!

The aged king Sukamaandran was sitting on the ornate chair, his eyes closed. The long legs were crossed at the heels, his hands were tightly clutching the arms of the chair, and the royal pendant against his chest moved up and down every time he took a breath.

An attendant rushed in and bowed. “Maharaja, the royals have arrived, and the ceremony is about to begin.”

The king did not budge.

After several moments, the attendant moved closer with reluctant steps, cautious enough not to step on the silk carpet, and called again, “Maharaja?”

A cold breeze blew through the lattice window, gently ruffling the king’s white mane as if answering the question.

One among the several instructions of the king - not to disturb him while he was on his ornate chair. But this attendant had no choice. Prince Raghavendran had ordered him to bring the king to the dais immediately. Unable to make a decision, his mind wavered in confusion. He stood scratching the rough hairs under his white turban. *Whose order should I comply with?*

While the king’s chamber was as still as the wind before the storm, downstairs in the palace courtyard everyone was running helter-skelter tending to the needs of the ceremony. The sacred fire was already lit and barrels of ghee were being tipped into it. As the smoke from the fire rose into the sky, the priests and holy men chanted their potent slokas.

Amongst all the commotion that prevailed, the prince kept looking ahead of the priest’s shaven head. His eyes scanned the cusped arches in search of his father. *How much longer! These attendants!*

He looked over to his son. Baladitya was sitting cross-legged, piously repeating the chants. In a few moments, the priest would call for the bride. *Why is father still not here?* Losing patience, he asked for an excuse and left.

When the sentries by the door heard the hurried footsteps of their prince, they instinctively withdrew their crossed spears and moved aside. Raghavendran entered the chamber. “Father,” he called.

The attendant turned around. “Yuvaraja, I hav—”

Raghavendran interrupted with a flick of his wrist. The attendant bowed and withdrew from the chamber.

The prince moved closer. “Father, everything is ready. You have to come down to bless the Mangalyam.”

No response.

“Father, Baladitya has been seated on the mandap. If we delay, the auspicious time would pass.”

The king continued to remain in his comatose state, nothing eliciting a response from him.

Seeing the king without any sign of life was so usual to them. The owner of the royal chain would get visions, a blessing from their beloved deity Aranyani Amman. And whenever the king would experience it, his face would glow, as if potent energy had filled his head.

However, today everything looked strange. The air that filled the room, the king’s body that was imperceptibly quivering, and the flickering five wicks of the tall lamp. Sighing, the prince walked up to it, added more oil, and raised the wick. Immediately, the lamp on the other side of the chamber started flickering. He knew what it meant and hovered anxiously, dreading the consequences.

When the prince was about to call again, the king broke from his trance and stood up. His brooding eyes flitted around before landing on his son.

“Father, what happened?”

Sukamaandran averted his gaze and stared dully on the floor beneath. “Sh-she... w-w-we hav-have th-then... fore-for-forest... cur-curs-curse—” he paused. After taking a deep breath, he declared, “She has come... Mandhakini has come.”

A loud gasp escaped Raghavendran’s lips. “Fat-fathe—”

“Shhhh, whatever may happen, we should never let Baladitya know about this.”

“Bu-she is—”

“Son,” the king interrupted. “Our Aranyani will save us.”

An uneasy silence descended between them. They traded solemn glances, unaware of the words to say to each other. After a moment, the king let a deep sigh, wore his royal slippers, and left the chamber.

Raghavendran's heart heaved in agony and he stood a long time staring at the marble floor. The mention of that name had triggered a memory in him, dark, scary, and unmerciful. Instinctively, his fingers ran over the silver ring on his thumb. He stopped. He had touched an engraving. The woman with crimson eyes, frenzy hair, and hands boring threatening claws. An unsettling fear stirred inside him and the name sprang up to his mind again.

'Mandhakini...'

On the banks of the Dhara River, Suriya Bhattacharya sat meditating. His face serene, lean body stiff as a rock, and hair hung down until his shoulders in thick dreadlocks. From one of the myriads of trees that surrounded him, a marigold flower landed upon his saffron dhoti as if pulled by his energy.



The place was ecstatic; the birds chirped their joyful songs, a deer walked shyly around the ashram, breeze flew in sweet currents, and streaks of sunlight struck down and fell over the sage. He was the kingdom's seer, a prophet, and a sincere Lord Sarveshwara's devotee.

Sukamaandran strode into the ashram and prostrated himself before the holy sage. *How do I face him? What do I tell him? Is there a solution?*

Until yesterday's dawn; not once he had a vision about her. The vision that scared him to death- not because it was so real. But it happened on a special day, the day to rejoice, the day his grandson Baladitya was getting married.

All-day, the vision echoed in his mind. Again and again, he heard her evil voice; his urgent pleas, and the name that she uttered aloud. He had been waiting for the sage to return from the temple in the deeper woods. And, once the sun came up, he rode towards the hermitage to ease his burning soul.

The sage opened his mellow eyes and looked up. The king stood, arms crossed, and eyes cast down with regret that filled his heart. "Is something disturbing you, Sukamaandran?"

Spurred by his soft tone, the king knelt on the ground and cried, "O Rishi, save us... save my clan..."

"Mandhakini... please listen. It was my mistake that I suspected you. Hurt me if you want but spare my clan, please..."

"You think you can calm me down?" she screamed and the flock of birds that were perched upon the mango tree scattered away.

"I know I cannot... but you have to und—"

"Don't!" She cut him off. "Don't you utter a word... you have lost that right!"

A strong breeze suddenly picked up, brushing away the unkempt hair from her face. Sukamaandran gazed at her. The face once filled with innocence and awe was replaced with a dangerous red of seething vengeance.

"Look!" She pushed her torn silk uttariya aside and held her arms in front of him. "Look, what you have given me, for the trust I had on you."

Sukamaandran averted his eyes from her slender arms, covered with blisters and searing bruises. "I-I am sorry, Mandhakini." He folded his hands together, begging for forgiveness. "I never intended to cause you this pain."

"Is it?" She glared at him with her large, intense eyes. "What you see on my arms is not pain, but the agony that is burning inside is the worst you had inflicted on me!"

“I did what was right, an—”

“Right?” she yelled. “So, is this right for you?” She reached for her waist, withdrew a scabbard, and unsheathed the blade. “Then what I am about to do is right too...”

“Man-mandak—”

Mandhakini burst out laughing. “Scared?” She laughed even louder and raised both her hands in mock appreciation. “The mighty king of Arava is scared!”

“I am ready to amend my mistakes, ready to die Mandhakini.”

“I know!” She snorted. “Killing you will remove that fear on your face. You have to live with this fear, every day, every minute, every second!”

She held the knife tightly in her hand and sneered. He knew what she was going to do and trembled. Before he could stop her, she had stabbed straight into her chest. Thick blood seeped out, colouring her flower embroidered upper bodice.

The thin lips muttered a few incantations, turning her eyes crimson red. “You have betrayed me!”

“Mandhakini!” he yelled, making his way forward to hold her.

“STOP!” she shrieked in anger, and the bleeding increased. “I promise on my blood, that my soul will never

“Leave you!

“Leave your clan!

“Leave anyone!”

Her face became pale, blood spluttered from the corner of her lips, and her legs were wobbling, yet she stood staring at him.

“Sukamaandran!” She broke into a maniacal laugh. “I will come back! I will come back for SHAYEEEESSSSHAAAAA...” she cried the name one more time before disappearing into thin air.

“Did you not expect this, Sukamaandran?”

The king cried in anguish, “I am ready to die, Rishi. But my clan? What mistake did they do to suffer her curses?”

“Do not worry.” The sage raised his hand in a blessing. “She cannot come out until Aranyani Amman stays inside the temple.”

Sukamaandran stepped forward, took the holy ash from the saffron pouch beside the sage, and streaked it across his forehead devotionally. “But... but... Rishi... the vision?”

The sage gave a philosophical smile. “That is the answer for the sin you had committed,” he said. “But when a man realises his mistake, he will be forgiven.”

“Rishi, sh-shall I enter the temple an-and pr—”

Bhattacharya’s grey brows bristled. “WHAT?” His thunderous voice echoed harshly, disturbing the vibrant peace of the forest. “Don’t you remember what happened? If you walk past the boundary that I had marked inside this forest, you will only see death!”

Sukamaandran knew what would happen if he did not obey the seer. He had already done it once and fell into her trap. Months had gone, but the incident had not stopped haunting him, be it the day or the night.

The king’s lips trembled, he fell on his knees, and cried in anguish, “Forgive me, Rishi! I was blinded by my fear... I never mean—”

“Arise.”

Hiding the chokes he felt in his throat, Sukamaandran said, “I will not enter, nor will I allow anyone, Rishi. All that I want is the safety of my people.”

“Sukamaandran,”

“Yes, Rishi.”

“Always remember and make sure to safeguard all the daughters in your family, especially from...” he said, hoarsely, “WATER!”

POEMS

தேவதையின் ஸ்பரிசம்

Original by Maya Angelo
In Tamil – Dr. C. Rajeswari

ஆனந்தத்தில் இருந்து
வெளியேறும் துணிச்சல்
நமக்குப் பழக்கமில்லை
நாம் தனிமையில்
சோழிகளுக்கும் சுருண்டு கிடந்தோம்,

காதல் தனது மிக உன்னதமான
கோயிலை விட்டுபுறப்பட்டு

நம்மை வாழ்க்கைக்குள்
சுதந்திரமாக விடுவிக்கும் வரை
நம் பார்வையில் தென்படும் வரை
காதல் வரும் போது
அதே ரயிலில் பரவசமும்
சேர்ந்தே வருகிறது
இன்பத்தின் பழைய நினைவுகளும்
வலியின் பண்டைய வரலாறும்

இருந்தாலும்
நாம் துணிச்சலோடு இருந்தால்
நம் ஆன்மாவிடமிருந்து
அச்சத்தின் பிடியை அகற்றிவிடும்

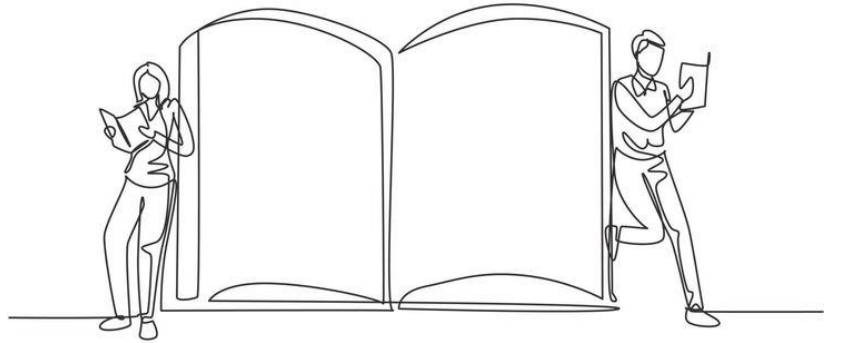
நமக்கு அடக்கம்
என்பது தாய்ப்பால் ஆகும்
காதலின் ஒளி வெள்ளத்தில்
நாம் துணிச்சலுடன்
இருப்போம்

காதல் நம் எல்லோரையும்
வாழ்விக்கிறது
வாழ வைக்கும்

இருந்தாலும்
காதல் ஒன்று தான்
நம்மை விடுவிக்கும்.



Maya Angelo



நினைவுகளின் நகரம் In Tamil – Vasandha dheepan

கவிதை எழுதினால்
வயல் முழுவதும் நெல் வளர்ந்தோங்கிடும்
நான் ரத்தத்தால் எழுதுகிறேன்
அக் கவிதை.

கவிதையின் சந்தத்திலிருந்து
தாகமுள்ள பூமியின் மீது அடர்மழை பெய்கிறதால்
நான் எனது எலும்பு மஜ்ஜையின் சாரத்தை கலந்து
உருவாக்குகிறேன்
மழை வந்தனையின் சங்கீதம்

கவிதை எழுதினால்...
ஐயோ, கவிதை எழுதினால்....

நீண்ட நேரம் அழுத பிறகு
தூங்கிப் போன அந்தக் குழந்தை
அவளைப் போல துக்கத்தின் அழகு
நான் வாழ்நாளில் வேறு எங்கும் பார்த்ததில்லை.

கவிதை எழுதினால்...

அணைந்து போன அடுப்பு முன்
வயிற்றில் எரிகிற நெருப்போடு
எவனோ அமர்ந்திருக்கிறான்.

கவிதை எழுதினால்...

எள் பூக்களின் உள்ளே
மெதுவாக _ மெதுவாக நுழைந்து கொண்டிருக்கின்றன
கம்பளிப் புழுக்களின் கூட்டம்.

கவிதை எழுதினால்...

மங்கிய நிழலில் பறந்து கொண்டிருக்கிறது
ஒவ்வொருவரின் சொந்த _ சொந்த பூமி
நகரம் விட்டு எப்போதும்
நறுமணத்தின் தேடலில் போகிறேன் கிராமம்
ஏதோ வேற்று கிரகவாசி போல
ஆகிப் போகிறேன்.

உன்னுடைய கஷ்டங்களில் நான் அமைதியாக _ அமைதியாக
அழ முடிகிறது
ஆனால் அதுவோ கவிதையாக இருக்காது
உன் அவல நிலை குறித்து எதிர்பக்கத்திற்கு எதிராக
கோபத்தால் கர்ஜிக்க முடியும்
ஆனால் அது கவிதையாக இருக்காது

இது ஒரு மாயம் _ கண்ணாடி இருக்கிறது
கவிதை, இதை எடுத்து சற்று தனிமையில் விளையாடுவது - போல
என்னை மன்னித்துவிடு !!



यादों का शहर / सुनील गंगोपाध्याय

நினைவுகளின் நகரம் in Hindi – Utpal Banerjee

यदि कविता लिखकर

खेत भर धान उगाया जा सकता

मैं खून से लिखता वह कविता

यदि कविता के छन्द से

प्यासी धरती पर घनघोर पानी बरसता

मैं अपनी अस्थिमज्जा के सार को मिलाकर

रच देता वृष्टिवन्दना का स्तोत्र

यदि कविता लिखकर

हाय, यदि कविता लिखकर

देर तक रोने के बाद

सो गया जो बच्चा

उसके - जैसी दुख की छवि

मैंने जीवन में और कहीं नहीं देखी

यदि कविता लिखकर

बुझ चुके चूल्हे के सामने

पेट की सुलगती आग लिए कोई बैठा है

यदि कविता लिखकर

तिल के फूलों के भीतर

धीरे-धीरे घुस रहे हैं कम्बलकीड़ों के झुण्ड

यदि कविता लिखकर

मलिन छाया में उड़ती जा रही है

हरेक की अपनी - अपनी पृथ्वी

शहर छोड़कर जब भी

गन्ध की तलाश में जाता हूँ गाँव

लगता है किसी और ग्रह का बाशिन्दा हूँ

तुम्हारी तकलीफों में मैं चुपके - चुपके रो सकता हूँ

लेकिन वह तो कविता नहीं होगी

तुम्हारी दुर्दशा पर प्रतिपक्ष के खिलाफ़

गुस्से से गरज सकता हूँ

लेकिन वह तो कविता नहीं होगी

यह एक माया - दर्पण है

कविता, इसे लेकर कुछ अकेले में खेलने - जैसा

मुझे माफ़ कर देना !!

Original by Omar Khayyam

In Malayalam by Varadhan

അവർ

സ്വർഗ്ഗത്തെ കുറിച്ച് സംസാരിക്കുന്നു

ഇവിടെയല്ലാ

സ്വർഗ്ഗം മറ്റൊരിടത്തുമില്ല

അവർ

നരകത്തെ കുറിച്ച് സംസാരിക്കുന്നു

ഇവിടെയല്ലാ

നരകം മറ്റൊരിടത്തുമില്ല

ഇനി

പുതുതായി വരുന്നവരും

സംസാരിക്കും

ഭാവികാല ജീവിതം

എന്നാലും, പ്രിയേ

ഇവിടെയല്ലാ

മറ്റൊരിടത്തുമില്ല

ജീവിതവും

ഓമർ ഖയ്യാം



